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# WHAT PART SHOULD FARMERS IN YOUR COUNTY TAKE IN MAKING NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY?



DS 8

This pamphlet is the eighth of the materials prepared for the assistance of rural discussion groups in 1936-37 through the cooperation of the Extension Service and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. It is not intended to direct attention to any particular point of view or conclusion, and no statement contained herein should be construed as an official expression of the Department of Agriculture. The materials listed below attempt to present, in readable, non-technical language, discussions of issues related to rural life. Their contents are not offered as either complete or orderly presentations, but as collections of current facts and attitudes which may be of use to rural people who are thinking about these questions for themselves.

Materials have been prepared for the 1936-37 season on the following topics:

- DS-1. What Should Be the Farmers' Share in the National Income?**
- DS-2. How do Farm People Live in Comparison with City People?**
- DS-3. Should Farm Ownership Be a Goal of Agricultural Policy?**
- DS-4. Exports and Imports—How Do They Affect the Farmer?**
- DS-5. Is Increased Efficiency in Farming Always a Good Thing?**
- DS-6. What Should Farmers Aim to Accomplish Through Organization?**
- DS-7. What Kind of Agricultural Policy Is Necessary to Save Our Soil?**
- DS-8. What Part Should Farmers in Your County Take in Making National Agricultural Policy?**

Two pamphlets on technique, intended primarily for the assistance of leaders of rural discussion groups and forums, are also available:

- D-1. A Brief Guide to Methods (revised 1936).**
- D-2. How to Organize and Conduct County Forums (revised 1936).**

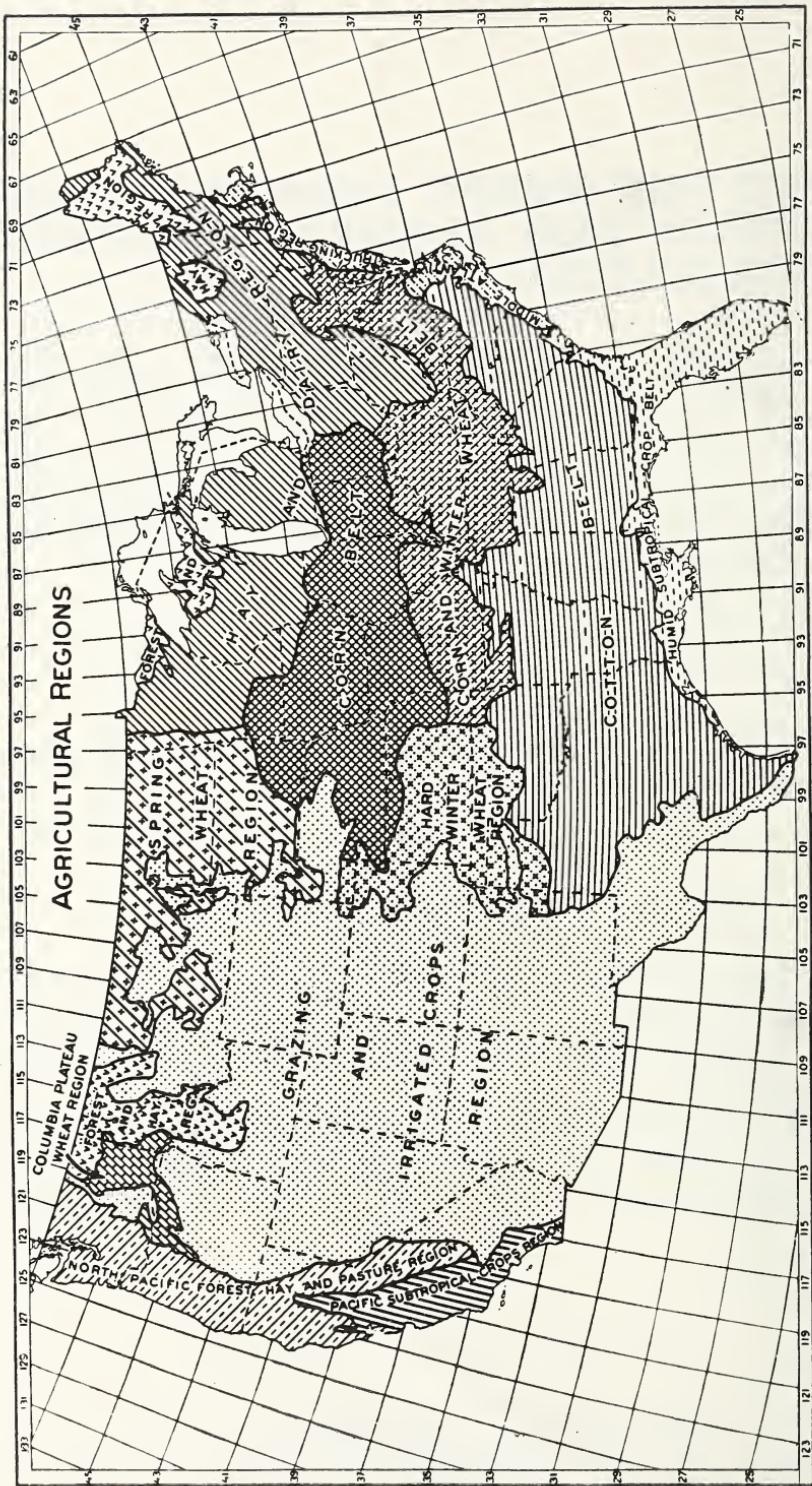
United States Department of Agriculture

The Extension Service and the  
Agricultural Adjustment Administration cooperating  
(Photograph by Department of Agriculture)  
December 1936

## WHAT PART SHOULD FARMERS IN YOUR COUNTY TAKE IN MAKING NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY?

Participation by farmers in making farm policy has been increasing in recent years. Do you think this tendency is good, or not? Why? If you approve, what form do you think policy-making by farmers should take?

1. **What part in national farm program-making do you think should be played by**
  - (a) individual farmers?
  - (b) county committees?
  - (c) county agents?
  - (d) state administrators?
  - (e) agricultural colleges and experiment stations?
  - (f) federal administrators and economic advisors?
  - (g) farmers' organizations?
  - (h) political representatives?
2. **What activities are going on in your county now that have a bearing on national agricultural policy? How could their effectiveness be improved?**
3. **Do you think farmers in your State should work on a State plan to go into effect in 1938? If so, what should be the chief features of the plan?**



## Regionalized Types of Farming

## WHAT PART SHOULD FARMERS IN YOUR COUNTY TAKE IN MAKING NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL POLICY?

"Well, THEY CAN VOTE, can't they?" In some county groups, this reference to political control is the first idea that comes to the surface in response to a question as to the farmers' part in agricultural policy-making.

"Well, suppose they do vote," comes one rejoinder. "WHAT GOOD WILL IT DO THEM? You know as well as I do how often party platforms are written just to catch votes. We've all seen candidates who weren't so keen about some things after election as before. To my way of thinking, marking a ballot is just signing a blank check for a group of fellows who'll forget you the day they take office."

"If farmers didn't do anything about national agricultural policy but mark ballots, I'd be inclined to agree with you," a third member is heard. "A good part of our political troubles comes from people thinking that they've done all that's required of them as citizens if they just show up at the polls. Goodness knows there's plenty of them don't even do that. They'd howl all right if anyone deprived them of their vote, but they don't mind depriving themselves of it."

"According to my idea, IF FARMERS ARE GOING TO HAVE A REAL PART in forming national agricultural policy, THEY'VE GOT TO MAKE KNOWN THE REAL INTERESTS OF AGRICULTURE, and develop the leadership to express them. We hear a lot about business sentiment being for or against this or that political measure. Farm sentiment can be just as much a factor in national policy, and we ought to make it so and keep it

so. Agrarianism has played a big part in the history of this country from time to time, but the times when farmers have insisted on having their say in the way the country is run have usually been bad times. Now it looks to me as though the bad times have usually come from policies that went wrong in good times. What we need is to keep pegging right along at national policy year in and year out, good year and bad year, and see that our people have a share in making national decisions."

### SHOULD FARMERS FORM PRESSURE GROUPS?

"That's exactly right," comes from an enthusiast sitting near the speaker. "What we farmers ought to do is to organize ourselves into AN A-1 PRESSURE GROUP. Pressure politics wins the day every time, and we need to put a good stout crowbar under national policy and roll things over in our direction for a change instead of letting the other fellows have it all their own way."

"I wonder if pressure politics makes national policy?" queries another member. "I grant you that there's no reason for farmers to sit by and let other groups skim the cream off the national wealth. But if the bankers grab all they can, and the workers grab all they can, and the railroads grab all they can, and the farmers grab all they can, do you think that all those grabs add up to national policy?"

### WHAT MAKES NATIONAL POLICY?

"Certainly every group in the country ought to have a pretty clear idea of what its interests are. But I myself believe that unless all the groups in the country can RECOGNIZE THEIR PARTICULAR INTERESTS AS PARTS OF THE NATIONAL WHOLE, we won't get a national policy. I'm for farmers' interests getting consideration, and farmers seeing to it that they do. But I'm also for consideration of the interests of other groups. To my mind, a good national policy is one which so adjusts the

various interests in the country as to provide the greatest mutual benefits."

"Right," agrees a friend. "This depression ought to have taught us that when the cities are having hard times the farms of the Nation can't hope to do well. If things are to go smoothly in this country THE VARIOUS PARTS OF THE ECONOMIC SET-UP HAVE GOT TO BE FITTED so that all the wheels can go round together, and I think a good many groups have learned that."

"So you say, but there's a lot of other groups that haven't," a skeptic adds darkly, "dog eat dog is the way the economic game is played, and farmers who want to look out for themselves had better realize it."

"I'm not such a pessimist as you," speaks up someone from the other side of the room, "but I'd like to see us come at this problem from another angle. Suppose farmers do take a continuing interest in the condition of agriculture, and suppose that they do get recognition of the interests of agriculture in the national policy. Where are the concrete features of that policy going to come from? Policy is all right in its way, and you have to have a general policy before you can get anywhere, but what then?"

#### HOW DO POLICIES BECOME PROGRAMS?

"Suppose you get the other groups in the country to agree that farmers ought to have a fair share in the national income. Well and good, but WHO'S GOING TO WORK OUT THE STEPS by which that fair share is brought into being? If policies are to be turned into programs, somebody has to do it. Otherwise, policies will remain pious wishes. I don't want to see that. They say hell is paved with good intentions, and I don't want to see farmers start a big public works project there."

"Right you are," comes a voice in support. "Up to now we've been talking about the legislative side of the farmers' movement. A policy gets its start in the ideas

of small groups of people who find themselves in agreement. It gathers momentum and by and by a political group takes it up and makes it part of a legislative program. Still later, it gets legal expression through a State legislature or through Congress. But most laws are not very detailed. When they are detailed, they don't fit, especially in a country as big and as varied as ours. THE ADMINISTRATION OF A LAW, the way it's carried out, IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE LAW ITSELF—sometimes even more important. Now we've heard how some of the people in this group feel about the legislative side of agricultural policy. I'd like to hear what some people have to say about how agricultural programs should be administered."

#### HOW SHOULD FARM PROGRAMS BE ADMINISTERED?

"The whole thing ought to be administered by the central government," the speaker is vigorous. "The trouble with farm folks is that they don't pull together. Some of us gee while the rest of us haw, and all we do is to tangle up the harness. We want someone in the driver's seat who will gather up the reins and say hep! and first thing we know we'll all be moving off up the road in good style."

"Hold on, now," counters a neighbor. "Farmers aren't mules, if they do sometimes act like them. No matter if your driver could start us off in the best direction in the world, I'd be against it, because I believe that people in a free country ought to go places because they know where they're going and believe that's where they ought to go, and not because they're driven."

"I have another objection," chips in a man who is known for his good farming. "I myself don't believe that a central government, as your driver, could know what is the best direction, especially in a country the size that ours is. The local differences are too big, and too important. I believe that ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY, like legislative policy, HAS TO BEGIN OUT NEAR THE

GRASS ROOTS. There are certain things that the central government ought to do in working out a farm program. But just as no farm program can be sound politically that doesn't have the backing of the bulk of the farmers, no program can be sound economically that doesn't look for its basic facts in the agricultural counties of the country where the farming is carried on. At least, that's the way it looks to me."

"Any program that works has got to look to the counties for more than information," adds a neighbor of the speaker. "Farmers need to be in on the making of programs, all right. But the best program in the world won't run itself. The way a program is handled locally may make all the difference between success and failure. Farmers need to be in on operating the program as well as framing it."

### WHERE DO SPECIALISTS COME IN?

"There's another group of people besides farmers and administrators who have to be in on this," contributes a youngster just out of college, "and that's the specialists. Good agricultural policy can't be made without THE HELP OF A GREAT DEAL OF SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE. Some of that knowledge is the fruit of experimental investigations of soils, plant and animal breeding, farm management practices. Some of it is the fruit of economic investigations of prices, movements of population, levels of consumption and the like. If farmers are to live well in this complicated world, we'll need to take advantage of the work of experts in these fields."

"To bring this discussion right close to home," says a man who prides himself on being practical, "WHAT OUGHT WE TO BE DOING HERE IN THIS COUNTY toward making policy for agriculture?"

### WHAT ABOUT THE COUNTY PLANNING PROJECT?

"Well, a good many of us here worked on the county planning project last year, and some of us old-timers

have served on road commissions and school boards since goodness knows when," supplies the father of the college boy.

"That county planning project is nothing but a piece of play-acting," the skeptic's voice is heard again. "Our county's too big for your county committee to do anything but guess at figures, and when you're through the higher-ups aren't going to pay any attention to them anyway."

"I've seen lots worse figures than those we handed in last year," replies the father evenly, "and last year was our first year at it. I think we have a better idea of what's what in this county than ever before, as a result of that work. We know what's happening to our soil, and we have an idea of what we might do to save soil and improve income at the same time. Even if what we did had no value to anyone beyond the borders of this county, I think it would have been worthwhile for showing us how we can **BALANCE OUR PRODUCTION RIGHT HERE AT HOME.**"

"That's a turn I wouldn't like to see the project take, just the same," the man who is known for his good farming re-enters the conversation. "To my way of thinking, this county planning project has, in the economic field, the same kind of possibilities if used right, and the same kind of dangers if used wrong, as the formation of a farmers' movement in the political field. If we use it so that it gives us a clear idea of our county's resources at the same time that we get a clear idea of other counties in our region and other regions in the nation, then I think it's the biggest step forward in years.

"But on the other hand if we use it with an eye to seeing how nearly self-sufficient we can make our own county, and recommend changes in the agriculture of our neighborhood without any regard for what is being done in other neighborhoods, we're likely to be worse off when we're through than when we started."

"That reminds me of what I read in the paper a while ago," interrupts the boy just out of college. "A German



**Where Do You Think the County Planning  
Project Is Heading?**

chemist was over in this country and had seen some of our experiments in finding industrial uses for farm products. He said that while Americans are trying to divert food to industrial uses, Germany is trying to turn waste products of industry into food. I remember thinking, 'There's self-sufficiency for you. Why shouldn't we trade?'"

### CAN THE COUNTIES WORK TOGETHER?

"Yes, that's the trouble with efforts at self-containment. To my mind, the doctrine that the open door is at home has a catch to it. People who go through the open door into the nation are apt to go next through the open door into the region, then the open door into the county, and finally to find that all those doors are trap doors which shut behind. We want to keep this county planning project headed the other way. We want first to know just what we've doing here in the county. Then, we want to figure what changes, if made by us along with all the other agricultural counties, would build a farm program that would be better all round than the farm practices we have today."

"If we're going to put such a program into effect, WE'LL HAVE TO WORK MIGHTY CLOSELY WITH OTHER COUNTIES," speculates the college boy's father.

### CAN THE STATES WORK TOGETHER?

"Yes, and how big a chance do you think you have of doing it," the skeptic rejoins. "Mark my words, after 1938, when the farm program comes back to the States, every State group is going to try to make a plan that will push the products of its particular State and let the rest go hang."

"That sort of thing is happening all the time. State legislatures pass laws that materials for State buildings must be bought whenever possible within the limits of the State. State relief agencies do not recognize the claims

of those who haven't legal settlement in that particular State. We'll have the same thing in agriculture, if State plans go through. First thing we know there'll be 48 little AAA's, all operating on the basis of each-man-for-himself. Mark my words, that's what's going to happen."

"Well," the county committee member deliberates, "things might turn out that way, if folks went at the project without thinking it over. But I'm not ready to admit that that's how they're going at it.

"After all, the farmers of this county aren't so green at farm program making as you seem to think. We've had enough experience to see where the each-man-for-himself principle gets us. What has already been said here shows that a good program has to be built out of the special contributions of different kinds of people, or rather, of people in different kinds of jobs.

"The local facts from which the program is set up, and the local administration by which the program is put into effect have to be provided by us farmers. County figures need to be fitted together by states, and recommendations looked over by the state agricultural specialists. The job of the national administrators is to take a bird's-eye view of the whole situation, and FIT THE STATE AND COUNTY RECOMMENDATIONS INTO A WORKABLE WHOLE which the states and counties can then administer. How does that strike you?"

#### HOW SHOULD COUNTY COMMITTEES BE CHOSEN?

"It strikes me that if the county committee is going to have as important a job as you say," a new voice is heard, "the selection of that committee is a pretty important matter. I'd like to know how people feel about that. Should committees be voted for, should they be picked by state or local officials, or should existing committees select the men who are to follow them? How long should committeemen serve?"

## WHO SHOULD SERVE ON COUNTY COMMITTEES?

"If you're going to get into that, there's a point I'd like to raise," a merchant from the county seat speaks up. "Farm income is bound to be affected by the programs your committees make; in fact, adjustment of farm income is one of the big aims in making programs. Now farm income in this country is first of all important to the 25 percent of our people who live on farms. But the size of that income means everything not only to the actual farmers, but to the further 20 percent of our people who live in villages and towns in rural areas. The teachers, doctors, lawyers, the merchants like myself who do our business in country districts depend on the income of the farmers just about as much as the farmers themselves. Where do we come in? Oughtn't we to have a place on county planning committees?"

"The question of how county committees should be made up," replies a man sitting near the merchant, "really needs to be discussed from two angles. You've just mentioned groups closely concerned with farm income yet without a voice in agricultural policy making. That's one side of the matter. The other is how to relate the several groups that are now concerned with one or another of the local phases of farm policy-making, so that we can get to work on policy for the county as a whole.

"Now here's what I want to know. If we are going to get down to business on this county planning proposition, DON'T WE NEED TO GET ALL THE DIFFERENT GROUPS IN THE COUNTY TIED IN WITH THE COUNTY COMMITTEE, at the same time that we look around and see what interests there are in the county that haven't a chance to be heard under the present set-up?"

Do some of the previous speakers represent your point of view? If so, can you quote additional facts to support what they said? If not, can you give a brief statement of the case as you see it?

What facts have been collected with regard to the agricultural situation in your county? In the light of these facts, DO CHANGES IN FARM PRACTICES SEEM DESIRABLE? How do proposed changes affect your farm?

Do you think the county planning project is a desirable part of national agricultural program-making? On what reasons do you base your answer?

Just how will a planning program for your COUNTY have to take account of a STATE program? a NATIONAL program?

The following three goals have been suggested for a national farm program to be built out of the work of county committees:

- (1) Conservation of soil and land resources.
- (2) Reasonable farm prices.
- (3) Production of sufficient quantities of farm commodities to supply city consumers at reasonable prices.

What do you think of these goals? Would you prefer to replace them with others? Can you suggest additions to the list?

What do you regard as the most important first steps to reach the goals you have in mind?

## MORE ABOUT FARM POLICY MAKING

(Quantity prices may be secured on many of these publications)

Material on county trends has been prepared by the Agricultural Colleges of many states for use by the county agricultural planning committees. These charts, graphs and descriptions of local changes may be obtained by writing the State Agricultural Extension Services.

THE FORCED MARCH OF THE FARMERS. Russell Lord. Survey Graphic, New York City. April 1936. \$0.50.

FARM PROBLEMS AND FARM POLICIES. H. R. Tolley. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.

PROGRESS REPORT. National Resources Committee, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. June 1936. \$0.25.

LAND PLANNING. L. C. Gray. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Ill. 1936. \$0.25.

NATIONAL PLANNING BOARD FINAL REPORT 1933-34. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1934. \$0.25.

REPORT OF THE BOARD. Part I, National Resources Board Report. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1934. \$0.25.

REPORT OF THE LAND PLANNING COMMITTEE. Part II, National Resources Board Report. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1934. \$0.35.

GENERAL CONDITIONS AND TENDENCIES INFLUENCING THE NATION'S LAND REQUIREMENTS. National Resources Board. Part I of the Supplementary Report of the Land Planning Committee. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1936. \$0.20.

REGIONAL FACTORS IN NATIONAL PLANNING. National Resources Committee. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. 1935. \$0.50.

REGIONAL RECONSTRUCTION: A WAY OUT FOR THE SOUTH. Rupert Vance. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N. C. 1935. \$0.15.

SOUTHERN POPULATION AND SOCIAL PLANNING. T. J. Woofter, Jr. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, N. C. 1936. \$0.15.

THE SOUTH'S PLACE IN THE NATION. Public Affairs Committee, National Press Building, Washington, D. C. 1936. \$0.10.

PURPOSE OF REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT PLANNING CONFERENCES. H. M. Dixon. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.

COUNTY AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT PLANNING. Bushrod W. Allin. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL LAND PROGRAM. L. C. Gray. Resettlement Administration. 1935. Free.

SOIL EROSION AND ITS CONTROL IN THE U. S. W. C. Lowdermilk. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.

PLANNING IN A DEMOCRACY. Lewis Lorwin. Plan Age, February 1935. \$0.20.

IS PLANNING COMPATIBLE WITH DEMOCRACY? Bushrod W. Allin. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.

NEW FRONTIERS OF DEMOCRACY. E. E. Lewis and M. M. Chambers. American Education Press, 40 S. Third St., Columbus, Ohio. 1935. \$0.25.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY: PUBLIC AFFAIRS FORUMS. J. W. Studebaker and C. S. Williams. Bulletin 1935, No. 17. Department of the Interior. Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C. \$0.10.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY. M. L. Wilson. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. 1936. Free.